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The Problem of Population Adjustments in Brookings County

W. F. Kumlien

C. Scandrette

Raymond Hatch

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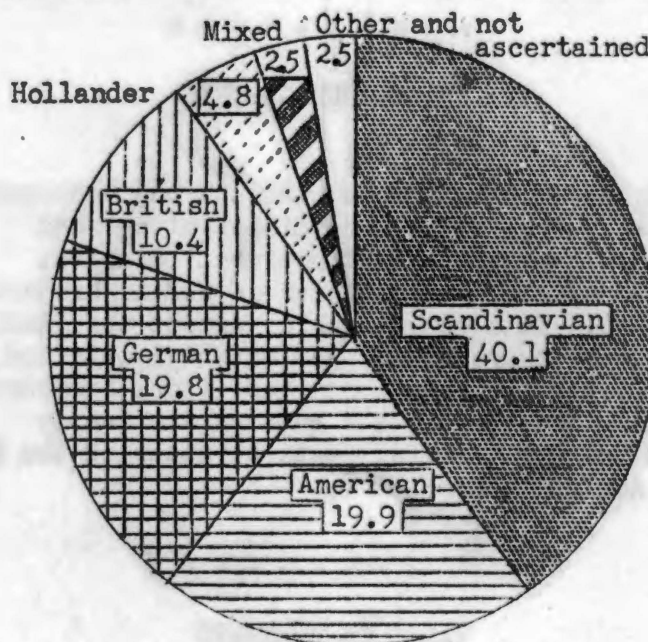
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THE PROBLEM OF POPULATION ADJUSTMENTS
in
Brookings County

W. F. Kumlien
C. Scandrette
Raymond Hatch

Nationality of Brookings County Household Heads



In order to understand the social interactions of any population group, one must know their nationality background. Differences in work customs, educational traditions, recreational interests, neighborhood persistence, religious beliefs, agricultural practices, thrift and frugality, progressive tendencies, and other activities and attitudes can be partially explained by variations in nationality background.

Department of Rural Sociology
Agricultural Experiment Station of the South Dakota State College of
Agriculture and Mechanic Arts, Brookings, South Dakota

EXPLANATORY NOTE

During recent years the following significant changes have occurred in the composition and distribution of population in Brookings county: the total population has declined; the proportion in the younger age groups has decreased while the proportion in the older age groups has increased; the sex ratio has become more nearly equal; the percentage of foreign born has decreased; the birth rate has been sharply curtailed; and tenancy has increased. Some of these changes have come about as adjustments to changing social and economic conditions. Because a lag always exists between a changing population pattern and long established social institutional patterns, it is now recognized that some of these population changes call for widespread social readjustment.

* * * * *

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This study was made possible through the cooperation of the State Work Projects Administration and the South Dakota Agricultural Experiment Station. The project is officially designated as W.P.A. Project No. 665-74-3-143. To a considerable extent the findings of this pamphlet are based upon material obtained from Farm Security Administration grant files. For permission to use these files, the authors are deeply indebted to Mr. Emil Loriks, State Director of the Farm Security Administration.

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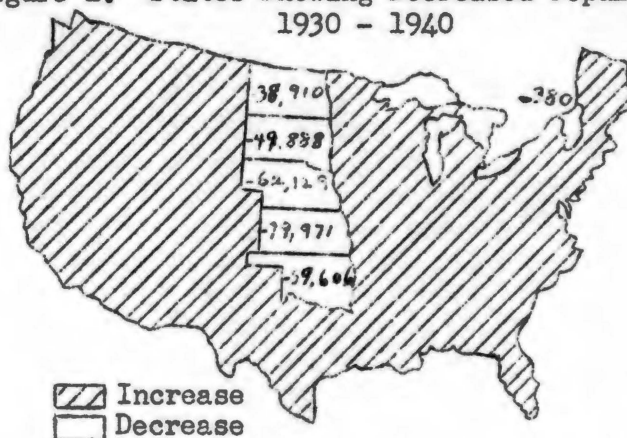
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The Problem of Population Adjustments in Brookings County

***** Introductory Statement

Final releases of the 1940 census reveal the fact that only six states experienced population decreases during the decade 1930-1940. The location of these states is shown in Figure 1. Except for Vermont (which suffered a negligible loss of 380 persons) these states form a north-south band across central United States in what is known as the Great Plains area. A region of relatively light rainfall even in normal times, it was hardest hit by the severe drouth of the 1930's. In each of the five states precipitation was below the normal figure in at least seven of the ten years.

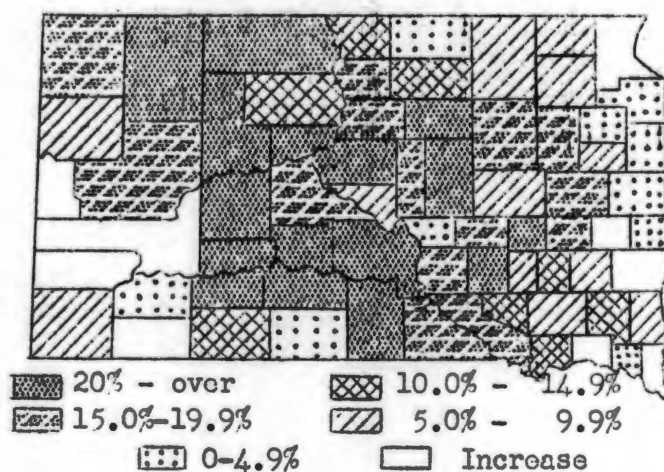
Figure 1. States Showing Decreased Population, 1930 - 1940



South Dakota received only 82 percent normal rainfall during this period—a figure lower than that for any of the other Great Plains states. Precipitation was below normal in each of the ten years, with the drouth taking rank as the most severe and prolonged since 1890, the year in which the weather records were first kept. In 1934 when precipitation reached an all-time low of 13.2 inches for the state, crop failure amounted to nearly 100 percent in over two-thirds of the counties.

These conditions not only caused many families to leave the state but also resulted in heavy relief loads. Between July, 1933, and June, 1935 South Dakota led all other states in the percentage of its population on Federal relief.*

Figure 2. Gains or Losses in South Dakota's Population by Counties, 1930-40.

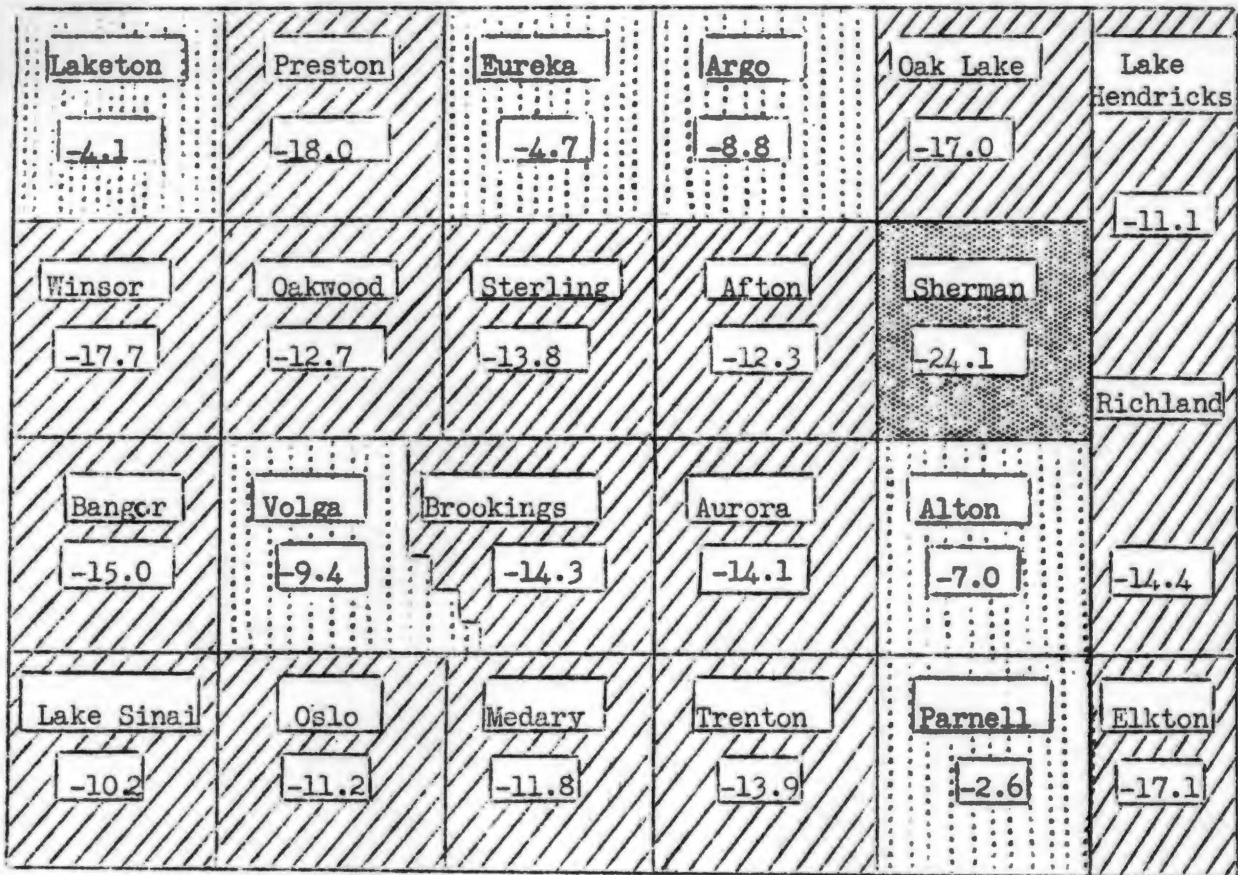


Population losses varied considerably among counties of the state, as shown in Figure 2. Sixty of the 69 counties lost in population, with losses ranging from less than 2 percent to over 30 percent. In Brookings county the population decline amounted to 1.7 percent. It will be noted that the central and western counties (the Black Hills area excluded) where the drought was most pronounced, suffered the heaviest losses. These same counties had the highest per

capita expenditures for relief.

* Kumlien, W. F., A Graphic Summary of the Relief Situation in South Dakota, 1930-1935, Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin Number 310, South Dakota State College, Brookings, South Dakota.

Figure 3. Farm Population Losses in Brookings County, by Townships, 1930-1940



Legend:  0.0 - 9.9%  10.0 - 19.9%  20.0 - 29.9%

Between 1930 and 1940, the population of Brookings County decreased by 287 persons. The past decade thus marked the end of a period of steady growth during which a percentage gain was reported at each decennial interval.

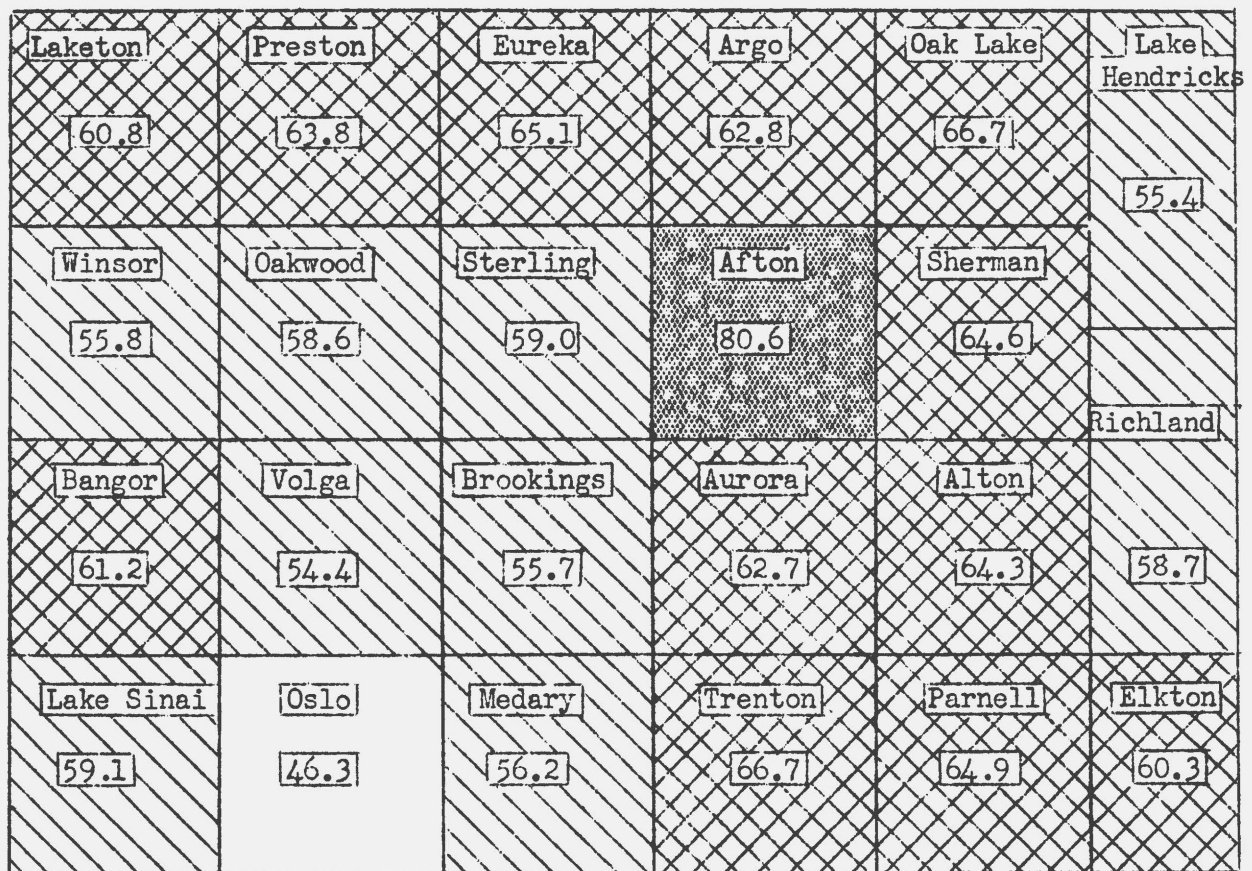
Year	Population	Increase	Percent Increase
1940	16,560	- 287	- 1.7
1930	16,847	728	4.5
1920	16,119	1,941	13.7
1910	14,178	1,617	12.9
1900	12,561	2,429	24.0
1890	10,132	--	--

Source: U. S. Census Reports.

The percentage change in farm population in townships of Brookings County is shown in Figure 3. Losses occurred in each township, and despite the range of from 2.6 percent in Parnell Township to 24.1 percent in Sherman Township, they were rather uniform throughout the county. This indicates a general depopulation of rural-farm areas, although the losses were moderate in comparison with those in most of the other counties of the state. While country areas were experiencing population decreases, the combined population of the eight towns and villages of Brookings County showed a substantial increase from 7,257 in 1930 to 8,251. The city of Brookings accounted for almost the entire gain, with its 1940 population of 5,346 representing an 18 percent increase over the 1930 total of 4,376 persons.*

* Final releases of 1940 U. S. Census.

Figure 4. Tenancy Rate in Brookings County, by Townships, 1938.



Legend: 40.0 - 49.9% 50.0 - 59.9% 60.0 - 69.9% 70.0 - 79.9% 80.0 or more

Source: Farm Security records, supplemented by other sources.

According to the 1940 census, 57.3 percent of all farm operators in Brookings county were tenants. Figure 4 shows the distribution of tenancy among the townships of the county as of 1938. The tenancy rate which varied from 46.3 percent in Oslo township to 80.6 percent in Afton township, was lowest in the southwestern and the easternmost townships. It is of interest to note that the Scandinavian is the predominant nationality in most of the townships having the lowest rate of tenancy.

The Table below shows the steady rise in tenancy rate and the recent trend toward increased size of farms.

Year	Tenancy Rate	Number of Farms	Average Size of Farms in Acres
1940	57.3	1929	255.2
1930	52.6	1991	242.2
1920	46.0	1891	249.7
1910	42.1	1738	272.6
1900	29.6	1640	277.5
1890	15.0	1555	214.7

The existence of a high proportion of tenant operated farms may be a detriment to community life. Social organizations tend to be weaker and less stable than in localities where owners predominate. The insecurity of the renter's tenure is chiefly responsible for this situation. Operating under a short term lease, he often fails to remain in one community long enough to develop a feeling of responsibility for the support of its organized social life. Absentee ownership is not conducive to community betterment. Non-resident landlords too frequently are interested only in the returns from the farm, and oppose community improvements in so far as they make for a higher tax levy.

Figure 5. Leading Nationalities* of Farm Operators in Brookings County Townships, 1938

Laketon Scand. 63.2	Preston German 26.8 British 25.6 Scand. 24.4	Eureka Scand. 50.0	Argo German 46.8 Scand. 29.1	Oak Lake Scand. 39.8 German 30.7 Amer. 25.0	Lake Hendricks Scand. 74.3
Winsor Scand. 41.3 German 22.5	Oakwood Scand. 42.9	Sterling Scand. 42.4 Amer. 30.6	Afton Amer. 36.4 German 29.9	Sherman Amer. 73.2	Richland German 52.9
Bangor Scand. 67.0	Volga Scand. 45.5 Holland 29.5	Brookings Scand. 44.8 Amer. 26.7	Aurora Amer. 33.7 British 20.5	Alton German 35.7 Amer. 31.0	
Lake Sinai Scand. 92.3	Oslo Scand. 85.7	Medary Scand. 46.9 Amer. 30.9	Trenton German 32.9 British 22.0 Scand. 22.0	Parnell Amer. 36.5 German 23.5	Elkton Germ. 46.6 Amer. 25.9

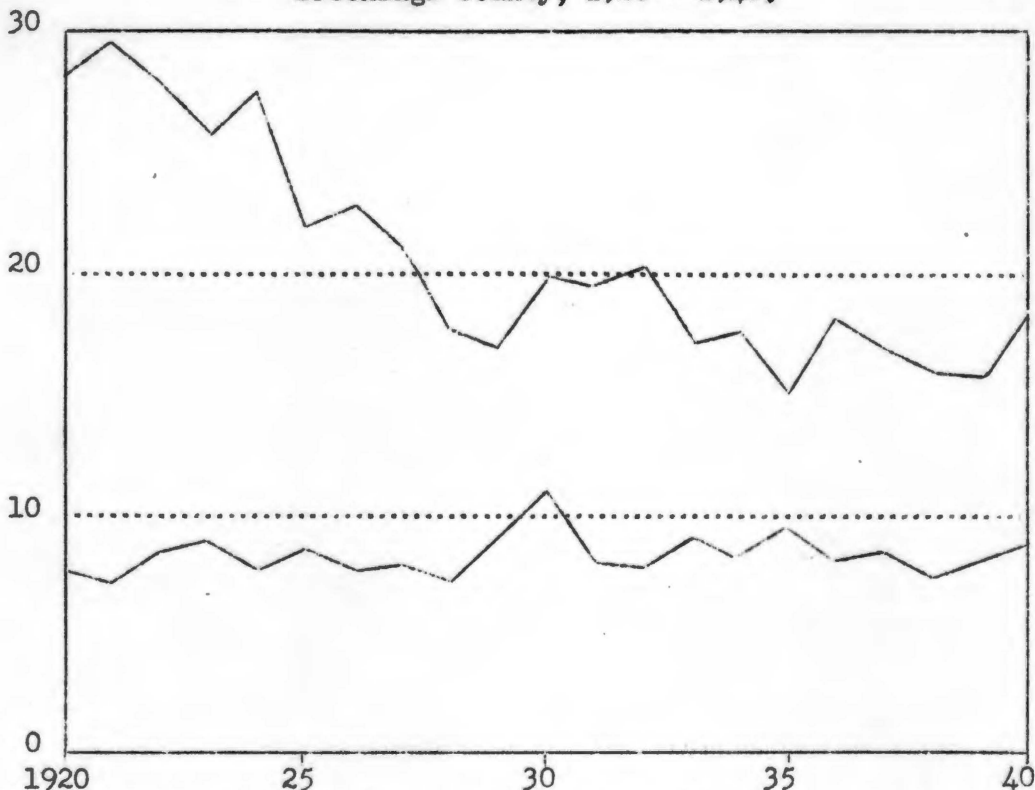
* Includes all nationalities comprising 20% or more of the farm operators.

Source: Farm Security records, supplemented by other sources.

Figure 5 shows the nationality make-up of the farm population in each of the townships of Brookings County. It will be noted that the Scandinavians are more numerous than any other nationality grouping in 11 of the 12 townships occupying the west half of the county, and that they lead in two northeastern townships as well. The Germans enjoy a plurality in six townships, while the Americans are prevalent in the remaining four.

As previously observed, nationality background is an important factor in determining habits, customs and reaction patterns. A striking relationship revealed by this study is that which exists between nationality and denominational preference. In each of the 13 townships in which the Scandinavians prevail, the Lutheran is the predominant denomination. In these townships it claimed from 48 percent to over 94 percent of the total population in its preference group. (For more complete discussion of the relationship between nationality and denomination, see Rural Sociology Pamphlet No. 21, The Problem of Over-Churched and Unchurched Areas in Brookings County.) A further relationship which comes to light is that between nationality background and neighborhood persistence. It was found that the smallest, most clearly defined and most vigorous neighborhood groupings are found in areas where either the Scandinavians or Germans predominate. Nationality ties have served as an especially potent force in binding together persons of these nationality groupings.

Figure 6. Number of Births and Deaths Per 1000 of the Population in Brookings County, 1920 - 1940.



Source: Reports of the State Board of Health.

Figure 6 shows the trends in birth and death rates in Brookings county, 1920 to 1940. It will be noted that the difference between the two rates (which represents the natural increase) is tending to diminish. This situation is resulting from a marked decline in the birth rate while the death rate is no longer being lowered. A comparison of five-year averages for the beginning of the period and for the end of the period (used because the number of births in any given year may not represent fairly the prevailing level of the birth rate) reveals that the number of births dropped from 27.7 per thousand of the population, 1920-1924, to 16.7 per thousand, 1936-1940. The death rate for the same five-year intervals remained almost constant at 8 deaths per thousand of the population. Since the period of greatest saving and prolonging of lives through medical science is probably past and since the population is gradually aging, a slightly rising death rate is in prospect.

Some of the principal factors in the fall of the birth rate are the desire for a higher standard of living, the adversity of economic conditions, and a more widespread knowledge of contraceptive devices. The problem of declining enrollments has been one of the most serious outgrowths of this trend. Between 1933 and 1940, enrollments in the elementary schools of Brookings county dropped 25 percent. Five schools had been closed by 1940, and 42 additional schools with 10 or fewer pupils were operating at very high costs per pupil. Since loss of population through migration was negligible, it appears that the decline in birth rate is largely responsible for the enrollment shrinkage. (A more complete discussion of this problem may be found in Rural Sociology Pamphlet 3, The Declining Enrollment Problem in the Elementary Schools of Brookings County.)

Figure 7. Age Distribution of the Farm Population in Brookings County, 1930 and 1938.

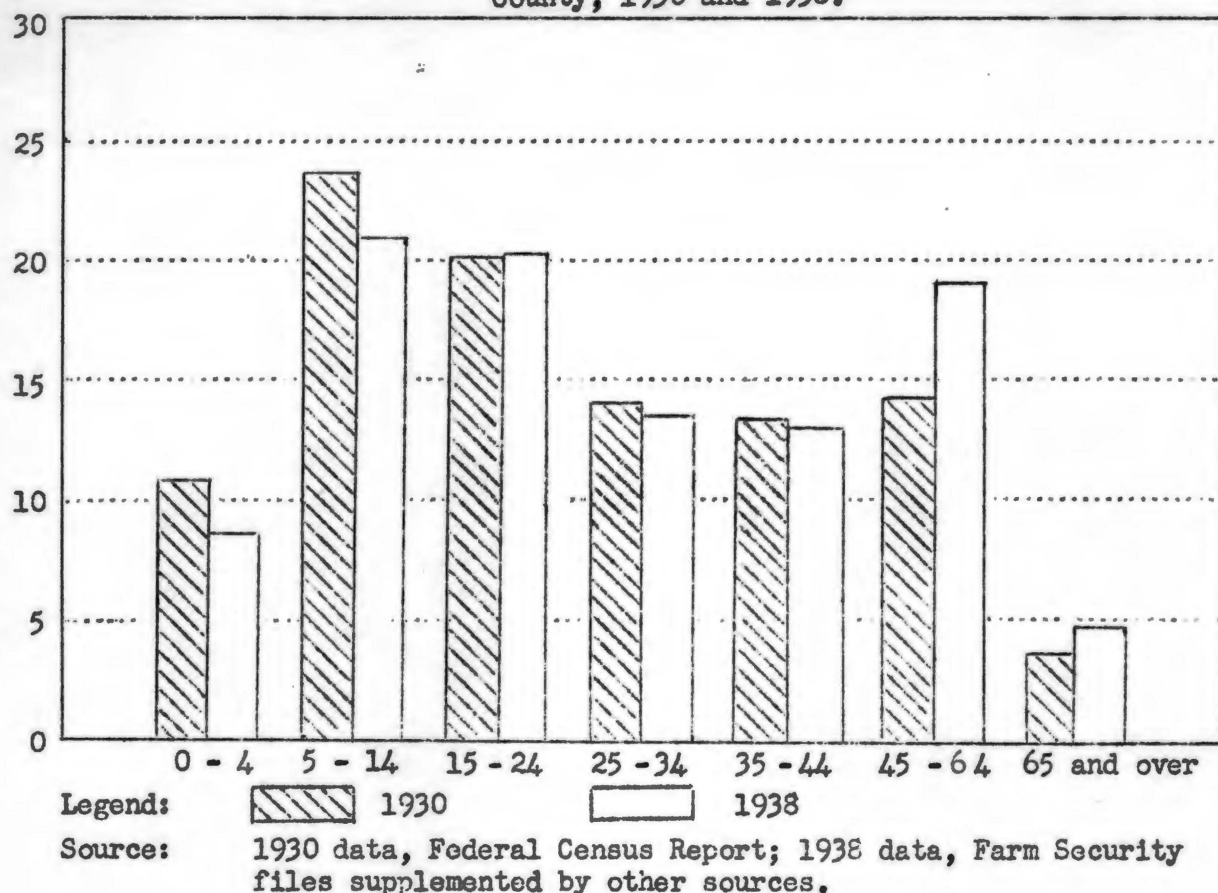
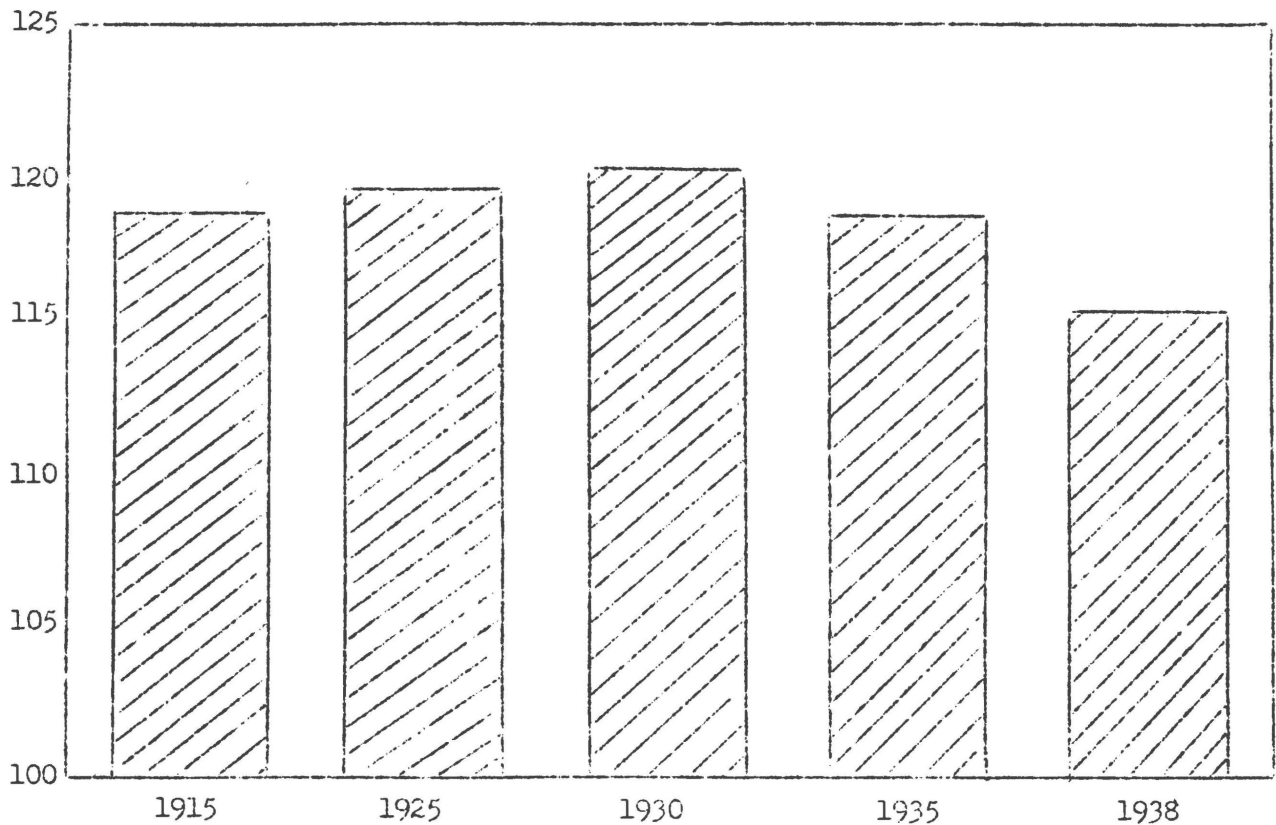


Figure 7 indicates the changes which occurred between 1930 and 1938 in the age distribution of the farm population. It will be noted, in general, that the younger age groups are constituting a decreasing proportion of the farm population, while the older age groups are making up an increasingly large proportion. Factors which are responsible for this situation include the decline in the birth rate, the relatively heavy migration of young persons, the maintenance of a low death rate, and the gradual maturing of the population. The most significant change occurred in the age group 45-64. This grouping included 19.0 percent of the population in 1938, as compared with only 14.3 percent in 1930.

What social consequences are arising in the light of these changes in population make-up? The most significant result of the decrease in the younger age groupings is the rapid dwindling of elementary school enrollments, calling for a reorganization of the existing school structure. The increase in the numbers and proportion of the aged will probably necessitate an extension of old age assistance giving rise to an increased tax burden; a lessening of population mobility; and a greater conservatism in tastes, habits, and public opinion.

The above-mentioned trends in age distribution are much more marked in towns and villages of Brookings county than in the farm population. According to the 1930 census, the proportion of persons over 65 years of age was almost three times as large in town and village as on the farm. On the other hand, the towns, with a generally lower birth rate, have fewer persons in the younger age groups. The preponderance of older people is partially due to the attractiveness of the town as a place in which to retire.

Figure 8. Males Per 100 Females in the Farm Population of Brookings County, 1915, 1925, 1930, and 1938



Source: State and U. S. Census reports, and Farm Security Records.

In any farm population there is a natural tendency for males to outnumber females. Farming is essentially a man's occupation. Single men are far more likely to be farm operators than are single women, and the paid farm laborers are predominately men. Farm girls have always migrated to cities and towns at an earlier age and in greater numbers than have farm boys. A high ratio of males to females was found in Brookings county in pioneer days, when many of the settlers were young, unattached males. Figure 8 shows the ratio of males to females for selected years since 1915, and indicates that the trend is toward a greater degree of equality between the sexes. The 1938 ratio of 115.1 males to 100 females is lower than that reported in any preceding year. Since the foreign-born element in the population has always had the greatest excess of males, the recent decline in the numbers and proportion of the foreign-born has aided the leveling process.

In the towns of Brookings County, the ratio between the sexes is almost equal. In 1935 there were 102.7 males for each 100 females in Brookings county towns and villages as compared with 104.4 in 1940. In Volga there were only 86.3 males per 100 females in 1935. The towns attract a relatively large number of women because of the opportunities for employment in clerical and domestic positions.

Some outgrowths of the trend toward equality in the sex ratio are likely to be an increase in the number of normal families, a slowing down of mobility, and increased emphasis on cultural refinements in the life of the community.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

1. Since the loss of farm population in Brookings county during the past decade has been accompanied by an increase in the size of farm units, the trend seems to be a healthy one, pointing to improved man-land adjustment.
2. The increasing tenancy rate constitutes both an economic and a social problem. Economically, tenancy, because of the usual short term lease, makes for a lack of responsibility on the part of the tenant which is reflected in mining of the soil and abuse of farm buildings. From a social standpoint, all organizations tend to be weaker and more unstable in tenant dominated areas than in localities where owners predominate. There is nothing inherently evil in tenancy itself but rather in the usual way in which it is administered. The policy of short term leases is undoubtedly the worst feature of tenancy as it now exists. It is felt that long term leases of the sliding-scale type would do much to alleviate the present social problem caused by tenancy.
3. Although the proportion of the foreign born in Brookings county is declining, nationality culture patterns continue to influence the lives of those of foreign descent. This is particularly true with respect to the family, neighborhood groups and church preference. The existence, distribution, and characteristics of various nationality groups within the county should not be overlooked in any program of land use planning. It is particularly important to have adequate representation from each nationality group on the planning committee.
4. The falling birth rate has resulted in a declining number of persons in the lower age groups, with consequent reduction in elementary enrollments. Because of the excessive per pupil costs for operating schools for only a few pupils, declining enrollment has recently been recognized as a real problem. Several suggestions for the solution of this problem are offered in the Rural Sociology Pamphlet Number 3, The Declining Elementary Enrollment Problem of Brookings County.

Aging of the population, a low death rate, and a decrease in the number of persons in the younger age groups through the operation of a lower birth rate and outward migration of younger people have resulted in a considerable increase in the proportion of persons in the older age brackets. As a high percentage of these persons are without financial resources, it appears likely that the number of persons needing old age assistance will increase. Attention should also be given to the building of more, smaller, and cheaper apartments to accommodate old people; to the prevention of diseases that afflict the aged, and to providing leisure time activities and facilities for oldsters.

5. The number of males per 100 females seems to be approaching equality in the farm population of Brookings county. This is probably a healthy condition since the trend toward equality in the sex ratio will tend to increase the number of normal families; retard excessive mobility; and introduce more refinements into everyday life.